

The Silver Lining in Turkey

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Articles & Testimony

The Obama administration's decision to scrap missile defense sites in Eastern Europe against long-range Iranian missiles has a silver lining: a chance to boost U.S.-Turkish ties and counter short-range Iranian missiles at the same time.

Washington has already announced that it will position short-range missile interceptors around the Mediterranean, and Turkey is a possible location for this system. Together with news earlier this week that the United States will sell Ankara Patriot missiles worth \$7.8 billion that can be used against short-range Iranian missiles, this is welcome news for U.S. steps toward Iran, as well as for U.S.-Turkish ties, which took a nose dive after the Iraq war.

Since coming to power in 2002, Turkey's Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has followed a policy of rapprochement with Iran while maintaining good ties with Washington. At the same time, public sentiments in Turkey toward the United States have cooled significantly; in many surveys the Turks appear as the most anti-American nation polled.

Now that Washington has taken two important steps toward Turkey in one week to ameliorate mutual ties, U.S.-Turkish ties have a chance to recover. That is, if the two countries build consensus on Iran. Washington has demonstrated that it considers Turkey a key ally. Now, Ankara needs to return the favor on Iran.

The AKP would be well served to balance its ties with Iran with the opportunity to build a new post-post-Sept. 11 strategic relationship with the United States. Washington's opening toward Turkey promises to cement ties, especially battered military ties, while providing the AKP with a chance to underline America's commitment to Turkey's security for the Turkish public. Washington has said that it will not leave Turkey out in the cold whatever the circumstances. The Turks need to hear this point from their government for the U.S. image in Turkey to improve, and for the two countries to start building consensus on Iran.

Poland's loss may be Turkey's and America's gain: Turkey is the only NATO country that borders Iran, and U.S.-Turkish cooperation on Tehran is key to Washington's success in tackling Iran's nuclearization.

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